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ON

THE ADVANCEMENT

OF

MIDWIFERY EDUCATION

IN

SCOTLAND:

A LETTER ADDRESSED TO DR ANDREW WOOD, PRESIDENT
OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS.

BY

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LETTER, ETC.

TO THE

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS.

SIR,

IT is a fact, that the Medical Officers of Her Majesty's Army and Navy, and of the Honourable East India Company, are, on admission to these services, more highly and perfectly equipped with Obstetric attainments, than the graduates of any of our home Medical Institutions whatsoever. These Scottish Medical Institutions are constantly sending forth youths, in every direction, to practise Obstetrics, stamping them with all the weight of their authority as qualified for the duty, and intrusting them with the care of all the parturient women in

the land. I say “Scottish,” not because our country is much behind the two Sister Kingdoms, but because I am a Scotchman, addressing myself to the interests of the country about which I am specially concerned. It may, then, be repeated, in varied terms, that the Medical Institutions of this country—*institutions intrusted by the Crown with the charge of Medical Education, and enjoying the well-deserved confidence of the public—do not demand of their Graduates such high attainments in Midwifery as are required of Surgeons in military service, who are seldom, if ever, called on to take charge of individuals of the female sex at all.* It is this difference which has appeared to me to justify the formal and printed Letter I now write.

I address it to you, Sir, because I have confidence in your sound judgment, in your candour, in your known zeal for our common profession, and chiefly because you at present preside over the Councils of the Royal College of Surgeons,—an incorporated Society of professional gentlemen, which has, I believe, done more than any other for the advancement of Medical Education in this Empire. Your College is, moreover, the institution which, of all in Scotland, has most to do in granting a licence to practise within our borders.

The present moment is peculiarly favourable for the discussion of questions in regard to Medical Education. For, you are well aware that, of late years, numerous schemes, of what is called “Medical Reform,” have attracted very much the attention of the profession, and not only familiarized us with numerous details in regard to Medical Education, but also led to the firm establishment of the great principles on which its laws should be founded.

It is admitted on all hands, that the honour and dignity of our profession will ever be more beholden for its elevation and maintenance, to the character of its individual members, than to any laws of Medical Reform, however just and necessary, which Her Majesty’s ministers may, in some happy time to come, be induced to consider and enact. Nothing is truer than that the reform of the profession, in its highest sense, lies with itself, and that the greater the confidence in State legislation, the less probable is the real advent of solid improvement. Increased attainments generally, and increased practical qualifications specially, when diffused among the members of the profession, will elevate and ennable it more than aught else; and it is delightful to know, that a wise Government has left in our hands such powers as

are necessary for the attainment of these objects, so far as they can be secured by the action of corporate bodies, such as the College over which you preside. Because Medical Reform languishes, hidden in undeserved obscurity in some remote corner of the Home Secretary's office, the profession should not be discouraged from pursuing those items of truest reformation which its own peculiar powers can reach.

The great importance of Practical, as distinguished from Theoretical education, is now admitted and acted upon in the regulations for instruction in almost all the higher professions. It does not, now-a-days, require to be shown, that a professional man should not merely have his mind furnished with unfruitful knowledge as to how to act, but should also have his hands, his eyes, and his ears educated, so as to be the ready servants of his mind. The introduction of practical education into our modern schools, is, in many respects, analogous to the change in the development of science, by the substitution of observation and experiment for the ancient methods of philosophizing. The Baconian method has no field more difficult to occupy than Medicine, as is testified by the tardy progress of its numerous able and zealous cultivators. Its advance has, however, been

very marked of late years ; and every step that has been made, renders practical instruction more and more imperatively demanded. Did this general position stand in any need of proof, I should merely have to mention the two greatest triumphs of modern Medicine,—first, in the practical uses of the ear with the stethescope, and second, in the uses of the eye with the microscope.

In the department of Medicine proper, practical instruction at the bedside was commenced at a very early period in the history of the Medical School of this city ; and, subsequently, a similar improvement took place in the teaching of Surgery. But it was not till about thirty years ago that the University and the Royal College of Surgeons made practical instruction in Medicine and Surgery imperative upon their graduates, and thus conferred an immense boon on the graduates, on the profession, and on the public. These innovations were at the time regarded with anxiety, not to say with fear. The lapse of years has amply justified their enforcement.

All who are acquainted with the history of the profession of Medicine in this country, know that Midwifery was long kept in the place of a foster-sister only to the more ancient Medicine and Surgery. It is not

very long ago, since the practice of Midwifery ceased to be regarded as beneath the dignity of a physician, and it was scouted by surgeons of the times immediately preceding our own. This history is characteristically verified in the events of 1824. While Medicine and Surgery were about that time easily successful in acquiring a practical, in addition to a theoretical teaching, the science of Midwifery was scarcely considered worthy of a place in Medical Studies at all ; and its installation into the Faculty of our distinguished University, gave rise to a most vehement controversy in the Courts of Law, which will not soon be forgotten. It is to be hoped that the easy completion of our Students' curriculum, by the addition of Practical Midwifery to the other requirements, will not bring to light any remaining bitter root of ancient and unworthy prejudice against this most valuable art. The addition will then complete the last stage in the tardy justice to the science and art of Obstetrics, and cannot fail to bring credit on the body that effects it,—as it will certainly indicate, with indelible mark, the progressive march of real improvement.

It appears to me to be quite a work of supererogation to take up your time in showing you the urgent

need there is of this addition to our Students' curriculum. The science, as it is ably taught in our schools, develops to the Student all the wonderful processes involved in the reproduction of the species. Its neglected art guides the accoucheur in his management of every mother in the kingdom, in the birth of every child. Neither Medicine nor Surgery can vie with it in the scope of its application to individuals. Every single labour requires judicious care; many are difficult, complicated, or preternatural. Diseases coming on after delivery produce many fatal results, in spite of all our care and skill. The new-born child requires the most delicate attentions, and, after all, the mortality, it is known, of children at birth and soon after, is enormous. I need say not a word more on this point to any intelligent man in the profession or out of it. The thought at once and naturally arises, Why has the practice of Midwifery been so long neglected? The brief history I have given of the subject in a former paragraph, while it affords the only satisfactory explanation, at the same time clearly indicates the course which ought now to be followed. The Public Boards of the Army, Navy, and East India Company have already given us sharp reproof for our

neglect. Their enactments imply, that every medical man they employ, should be, and must be, provided with instruction in Practical Midwifery, little as they may have to do with it in their Service. It is surely the duty of our Licensing Boards, to secure for the women and infants of our homes and neighbourhood, equally qualified practitioners. The supplying of this deficiency, imperfect as it must always be, cannot but abundantly redound to the advantage of the public. I have heard of many evil results from it, and have seen some. I shall not condescend upon examples, but be content with merely saying that I have been consulted by practitioners who had acquired the highest honours during their term of study, and been presented with the diplomas of Edinburgh, who could not extract a separated and half-extruded placenta in a decent manner.

Our far-famed Medical School has already lost the opportunity of leading the way in this, as it has done in many other improvements in Medical Education. But this may now be turned to our advantage, by stimulating to a worthy rivalry with our competitors for public confidence in the metropolitan cities of England and Ireland. It was my intention to have given you a sketch

of the state of Midwifery Education in the chief Medical Schools of Europe. I now find that postal and epistolary delays render the completion of this so distant, that I cannot wait for it. I therefore reluctantly beg you to accept the little I give now, which, on a future occasion, I may be able to supplement and complete. In London and Dublin, distinct degrees (or licences) in Midwifery, are now given separately from the Surgeon's and Physician's diploma. These special degrees are granted after special examination, for admission to which the candidate must show that he has practised the art. In London, this is done by the Royal College of Surgeons, which requires, as a preliminary qualification, attendance on twenty labours. In Dublin, it is done by the King's and Queen's College of Physicians, which requires attendance for six months on the practice of a recognised Lying-in-Hospital. It is also done there by the Royal College of Surgeons, which requires a certificate, showing that the candidate has conducted thirty labour cases at least. I may add, that only a few take out these degrees, and that they are not regarded by the public or the profession. The plan encumbers the youths who aspire to the honour, with a multitude of degrees and expenses, which are quite unnecessary, and fails to secure that

benefit to the public which is desired. It is, therefore, a plan to be shunned.

The first body to which I would direct attention, as having taken the right direction in this matter, is the modern and flourishing London University. It secures attainments in Practical Midwifery, by requiring of all candidates for its physician's degree, that he shall have conducted six labours. In England, also, the Royal College of Surgeons, and the Apothecaries' Company, require Clinical instruction in Midwifery, specifying no details. All other English Boards neglect the whole matter.

The ordinances of the Queen's University in Ireland, require of candidates for the degree of M.D., "Practical Midwifery, at a recognised Midwifery Hospital, with the Clinical lectures therein delivered, for a period of three months, in an hospital containing not less than thirty beds; or six months in an hospital containing not less than fifteen beds." No other Irish Medical institution requires of its graduates more than attendance on the theoretical course of lectures.

In regard to the Continent of Europe, my information is very meagre. I am indebted to Dr Charles Wilson for kindly pointing out to me the new regulations enact-

ed for the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, which require an extraordinary amount of Practical Midwifery before conferring licence to practise.

Dr Sigmund, of Berlin, has informed me, that in all the Prussian States, not only is a youth obliged to study Midwifery at the bed-side, but he is required, by his examiners, to show his ability in managing a case in hospital, before he can get the licence to practise.

In Holland, Dr Mess, of Scheveningen, tells me, no one is permitted to practise the art of Midwifery without the licence ; and previous to the acquisition of this, he must have had some experience in conducting, not natural labours only, but unnatural also.

Dr Spiegelberg, of Göttingen, writes that, in Hanover, the student, previous to getting the licence, is examined by a commission of medical men, who, if not satisfied with his attainments in Midwifery, send him to the Lying-in-Hospital, there to deliver a certain number of women under the eyes of the director, who is at the same time a member of the commission.

In Austria, the same gentleman informs me, the student must undergo a public examination of his practical Obstetric qualifications at the bedside of a patient.

In France, the candidate for honours is required, not

only to pass an examination in the Theory of Midwifery, but also to visit patients in an hospital, and be thereafter questioned as to the diagnosis and treatment of their cases.

These numerous and widely-spread examples will be sufficient to show how far we are behind some of our neighbours. Our Institutions are widely different from those of the Continent in many respects, and cannot, with justice or propriety, be moulded after their fashions. It will exercise the deliberative function of your body to devise the simplest and readiest plan for securing a growth and vigour in our Institutions equal to, if not like, those of strangers. On this subject I humbly submit, that the requirement from the student of a certificate, that he has personally attended a few cases of labour, in connection with a recognised Lying-in Institution, appears to me sufficient for securing the minimum qualification for the degree.

Finally, Sir, I am confident that when this important and necessary reform is effected, there will dawn a brighter era for Obstetric science and art than has yet been seen. I am sure that the profession will ultimately be great gainers by the change. I am sure that the public, for whom, and in whom, all our exertions in medicine should end,

will soon reap solid advantage; and, lastly, the poor, who are, in a double degree of truth, “always with” medical men, will be the first to enjoy the benefits of a salutary change which will send a host of ingenuous youth into the practical study of Midwifery, and reinvigorate our sickly institutions, which are founded at once for the good of the poor, and the advancement of **Obstetrics.**

I am, Sir,

Yours very truly,

J. MATTHEWS DUNCAN.

55, CASTLE STREET, EDINBURGH,

January 28, 1856.

